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# **The Religious Possibilities** of the **Motion Picture**

**Herbert A. Jump**

**Minister of the South Congregational Church  
New Britain, Connecticut**

**Printed for private distribution  
December, 1910**





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## A STATEMENT

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In April, 1910, the minister of the South Church, New Britain, Conn., in a session of the Men's Civic Class, expressed a hope that some time a moving picture equipment might be owned and used by the Church. In a city of 15,000 wage-earners, many of them of foreign birth, he felt that the motion picture could be made a most serviceable adjunct to religious education.

Two months later, ex-Mayor George M. Landers, at the invitation of Mr. Jump, generously consented to endow a moving picture service in the South Church for thirty Sunday evenings, purchasing all necessary apparatus and meeting the expense of operating it. The announcement of his gift excited considerable newspaper notice and editorial comment throughout the East as being a decided innovation in church methods. Meanwhile the question of introducing the service was taken under consideration by the Standing Committee of the church.

Mr. Jump spent considerable time during the summer making a study of motion pictures, visiting the manufacturers' studios, sitting with the Censorship Board, consulting with exhibitors and managers of exchanges and social workers, and preparing his series of services for the winter of 1910-11.

In October, it was decided by the Standing Committee of the church that circumstances made it unwise for the South Church to conduct a motion-picture service this year, so the plan was abandoned.

The interest aroused by the proposal, however, and the correspondence stirred up by it, seem to justify the publishing of some memoranda setting forth the considerations which led to the original suggestion. Evidently many religious and quasi-religious organizations and also many thoughtful individuals will welcome information on this topic of the times, the motion picture. Accordingly, this pamphlet covers more than is demanded by its title, and it is also equipped with an appendix containing a few facts that may be of service to the inquiring social worker.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to quote the words with which one of the most refined and far-sighted of the film manufacturers greeted Mr. Jump: "The interests which you represent," he said, "are the interests which we wish to satisfy."

*"Jesus said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers which both stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.*

*And by chance a certain priest was going down that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.*

*And in like manner a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.*

*But a certain Samaritan as he journeyed came where he was: and when he saw him he was moved with compassion, and came to him, and bound up his wounds pouring on them oil and wine; and he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn and took care of him.*

*And on the morrow he took out two pence and gave them to the host and said, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, I when I come back again will repay thee.*

*Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbor unto him that fell among the robbers? And the lawyer said, He that showed mercy on him.*

*And Jesus said unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."*

# The Religious Possibilities

of the

## Motion Picture

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When Jesus desired to set forth the essential meaning of Christianity in a universal language that should speak to men of every age and all races, he chose a dramatic story. He told the parable of the Good Samaritan, and therein gave an example of ideal preaching which many preachers of the present day, alas! seem to have completely overlooked.

Note some of the details of that sermon-story. It was not taken from the Bible,—the Old Testament used as a Bible by Jesus' auditors,—but from contemporary experience. It was the sort of thing that might have happened any day and to any one in his audience. Secondly, it was an exciting story. Robber-tales always thrill the emotions, and much more in the ancient world perhaps than today, because then the risk and the likelihood of such deeds of violence were immeasurably greater than now. Thirdly, this narrative-sermon frankly introduces morally negative elements and leaves them negative to the end of the chapter. Was it not dangerous to the church establishment of that day to have its priest and Levite pictured as failing so utterly in the grace of compassion, held up to ridicule as hypocrites and poseurs? And as for the robbers themselves, not only did the story give a most realistic description of precisely how they perpetrated the cowardly crime of violence, but it leaves them victorious in their wickedness, scurrying off with their booty, unrepentant of their sins, probably chuckling at the folly of the traveller for venturing upon the notorious Jerusalem-Jericho road without a caravan to protect him from the highwaymen. And yet, despite these three dubious characteristics of not being Scriptural to the people who heard it, of being ex-

citing, and of having realistic and morally negative features in it, who dare assert that the story of the Good Samaritan has wrought harm in the world? Rather, has it not earned for itself recognition as being the central parable of all the master's teachings? Has it not exhibited in complete and convincing fashion the very heart of the Gospel? Has it not urged more men into lives of ministry and helpfulness than any piece of literature of equal length which the race has ever known?

#### PREJUDICE AGAINST MOTION PICTURES.

We have delayed thus on the story of the Good Samaritan in order to disarm if possible that mood of antagonism with which some of you approach the general subject of motion pictures. You "know that they are bad", because they are exhibited in a theatre that charges only five or ten cents admission. You have never seen many of them, perhaps not any of them; but from various sources, you hardly remember whence, the suspicion has been bred in your mind that the motion picture is evil and evil altogether. To assert therefore that there are any "religious possibilities" in the motion picture strikes you as the acme of absurdity. It is as though one were to announce a sermon on "The Spiritual Value of the Clog Dance." You have heard that motion picture stories are likely to represent crime, that they are exciting, and that scarcely a phase of modern experience has been overlooked by the manufacturer as he scoured the universe to find novel subjects for his motion picture films.

And now we come to the point: the objections which you and others thus make against the religious use of motion pictures can all of them be urged with equal force against the use of the most convincing parable which the Christ ever uttered. The films that have value for religious education today are those which portray truth as the Good Samaritan portrays it:—in a dramatic story, of contemporary experience, exciting in character and thus interesting even to the morally sluggish, picturing negative elements such as crime, accident, ignorance, sin, and thus commending itself as true to life, but in the end showing the defeat and expulsion of these negative elements by positive qualities, virtuous souls, God-like traits. The only thing needed to

make the parable of the Good Samaritan a conspicuously successful motion picture film is a new title. Call it "The Adventure of the Jerusalem Merchant", and it would appeal perfectly to the habitue of the dime theatre, and he would catch the noble moral of it far more swiftly, perhaps, than do many of the more well-to-do Christians, who hear it rather than see it, when it is droned forth from the pulpit by the preacher of a Sunday morning as the New Testament lesson.

#### HOW TO MAKE SERMONS INTERESTING.

The visible drama shown in the right sort of motion picture, accordingly, has religious possibilities just as the spoken dramatic story or parable has them. Both help to make the Gospel vivid. Indeed, one may venture the statement that the modern motion picture offers the most colossal opportunity for making a fresh moral and religious appeal to the non-churched portions of the community that has arisen in the history of recent Christianity. Why is it that people do not come to church? Many of them will say frankly, "Your church is not interesting; your service of worship is adapted only to the taste of those who have been trained up to it; I cannot understand your music and cannot keep awake through your sermons; the interest of the clergymen seems to be far more with Jehoikim and Ancient Babylon than with the living men and the living issues of today. In a word the church is dull, therefore I stay away."

How far these criticisms are warranted need not occupy us here. Suffice to say we shall meet these criticisms in part if we try to present Christian truth in forms of present-day life, illustrating its issues from modern America more than from Ancient Samaria. We also need to put Christian truth into pictorial and story form so that it will appeal to the imagination. The great popular preachers, Beecher, Moody, Spurgeon, and Gipsy Smith, all were masters in the use of word pictures. The moving picture machine enables the church to make the same form of appeal with visible and animated pictures. The pulpit orators and evangelists use "moving pictures" in one sense of the term, pictures that move the heart by their thrilling quality; but the picture that literally is moving, that portrays dramatic sequence and

life-like action, possesses tenfold more vividness and becomes therefore a more convincing medium of education. The common people love stories and buy the cheap magazines to an amazing degree; these persons would love the motion-picture church service which gave them religious truths through acted stories.

We men and women who have ever shown interest in pictures, hanging them on the walls of our homes, seeking them in illustrated books and now in picture-postcards, should turn naturally to the motion picture sermon which puts the gospel in a pictorial form. Some of you who attend church love the doctrinal phraseology of St. Paul. There is many a hardheaded American working man, however, who confesses freely that to him St. Paul is only a prosy old theologian. Paul, however, was not a prosy theologian to the men of his day. Why not? Because his illustrations for the gospel were taken from the life of his contemporaries—the racing habits of his day, for example, and the boxing matches. We ministers of today may not quite dare follow Paul in illustrating spiritual truth from the trotting park or a recent famous prize fight in a western city, but we have a right to use stories taken from life in the shop and factory and on the street as illustrations of the gospel to the men of today. Because the motion picture carefully selected will tell to the eye moral truths with vigor of illustration and an eloquence of impression which the most enthusiastic orator cannot command, it has a proper place in the equipment of any church which is trying to reach the masses.

#### THE VOGUE OF THE MOTION PICTURE.

The power and popularity of this new instrument which lies at hand for the church to use, if only it have the vision to do so, may be inferred from some statistics.

There are about 10,000 motion picture theatres in the United States exhibiting to a daily audience of more than 4,000,000 persons. The magnitude of this new sociological fact concerning the amusement habits of the American people needs to be more adequately recognized. The theatre in its older and more

familiar form is not a new institution in the United States and yet in all the decades of its popularity it never drew together a daily audience of more than 750,000 to its straight drama, vaudeville or burlesque. But here has arisen a new species of entertainment which in less than a decade has built up a daily constituency five times as large as that of its competitors who have been long on the field. The motion picture appeals, moreover, to old and young. 400,000 school children in New York city visit them every day. In some down-town districts in New York investigation shows that seventy-five per cent of the pupils attend at least once a week. Opening its doors to the public in the morning, the "M. P. theatre", as the motion picture establishment is called by the trade, draws thousands of working people for a period of relaxation at the noon hour, and there are Boston houses which are regularly patronized by the Back Bay set during the afternoon, when the weariness of shopping overtakes them and some rest of body and nerves is needed before the next department store is invaded.

#### RECENT STATISTICS IN NEW BRITAIN.

In order to ascertain the vogue of the motion picture in our own city, I secured the cooperation recently of the principal of a public school situated so that its body of pupils truly represented the complex and polyglot population of a Connecticut manufacturing center. The statistics were gleaned from 350 scholars from ten to fourteen years of age. All but 34 out of this number said that they went to the moving picture shows, 183 went as often as once a week, 130 went twice a week or oftener. 9 children went every day, of which number, however, 3 went because of business connections with the theatre, selling popcorn, etc. 6 others averaged six times a week. Of the 316 pupils who attended, 130 said they went without parents or older persons to accompany them, and only 20 limited their attendance to afternoon performances. Seventy-five went to Sunday evening performances. Having exhausted the list of inquiries which she had in mind, the principal asked, "Do you think of any other question I ought to put to you?" And one young hopeful piped



up, "Wouldn't you like to know which theatre we think is the healthiest,— has best ventilation, etc.?" And when the teacher asked that question she got as frank an answer as she had received to her other queries. The lines of thought suggested by these statistics are many, but there is no time to follow them up now.

#### THE BAD SIDE OF THE MOTION PICTURE THEATRE.

In our city not long ago, when a stormy day prevented the afternoon session of the public schools, a lad came up to the teacher's desk and triumphantly showing a nickel said jubilantly, "Now I'll have a chance to go to the moving pictures before I carry my papers." The problem of the poor man's leisure, someone has said, is the crux of the social problem. If only the motion picture—which has recently been authoritatively rechristened under the more convenient title of the "photoplay"—could be carried on by the school and church and municipality so as to fill the poor man's and the poor boy's leisure with helpful instruction and clean entertainments, instead of being carried on by private individuals not always of the most refined type for gain, it would be a splendid thing. The two points of danger in the "M. P. theatre" today are the character of the exhibitors who conduct the business and the character of the vaudeville acts which are generally interspersed between the different films to rest the eyes,—and apparently also to pander to a depraved taste on the part of the theatre-going public which, for reasons to be explained later, does not find in the motion picture itself the salacious and indecent elements which are craved. In the course of considerable exploration into the motion picture world during the last year I have visited scores of theatres in a dozen cities of the East; and while my testimony will surprise the uninformed, I am ready to declare that in all the hundreds of films which I have seen, there has not been a single one that was indecent and there have been only a very few that impressed me as morally dangerous to the community. This could not have been the report a year ago, and it would have been altogether impossible five years ago.



#### THE MAIN TROUBLE IS NOT THE PICTURES.

The fact is : that the motion pictures being shown in the United States today, thanks to the Board of Censorship established by the People's Institute in New York, show on the average a far higher moral tone than the plays and comic operas and vaudeville which are supported by the so-called respectable classes. Many motion picture films, to be sure, leave much to be desired in the way of refinement, good taste, delicacy of feeling—but public taste exhibits the same lacks. Meanwhile the percentage of innocuous pictures is much higher than the percentage of innocuous dramas, while behind the photoplay industry there is an intelligent body of men and women constituting the Censorship Committee, not in the least connected with motion pictures commercially, who are moving as fast as the public will permit toward a complete disinfecting of this form of entertainment from every taint of harm. And the leading manufacturers are co-operating most willingly and most intelligently.

Having spoken thus favorably concerning the motion picture itself, one must add, however, that the so-called motion picture theatre as at present conducted in many communities is a grave peril. The moral dangers attached to the darkness in which the pictures were shown in most theatres a couple of years ago, have been largely eliminated by the growing custom of exhibiting the photoplays in a half-lighted theatre. But the vaudeville acts sprinkled through the picture program are necessarily cheap, and therefore, not infrequently vulgar and even nasty. They ought to be strictly censored or entirely eliminated. Laws requiring that young children be attended by their parents or older guardians ought also to be universally passed and enforced, this not because the theatre is necessarily more fraught with peril than, for instance, the city street, but because the theatre is a newer and more popular diversion for children than the street, and so needs the more to be surrounded with safeguards.

#### THE MOVING PICTURE AS AN INVENTION.

A good argument could be made in the support of the proposition that the motion picture, in some respects, is the most won-

derful invention which has come into existence since the invention of printing in the fifteenth century. One day by accident Gutenberg discovered the art of using movable type. By help of this new art of printing, books which before had been only the luxury of the rich now became the possession of the many. Strikingly enough, the earliest use of the printed page was the religious use, for the first printed book was the Bible. The invention of the moving picture machine by Mr. Edison in 1889 has resulted in the same popularizing of a privilege which previously had been confined to a few. As printing made literature universal, so the cinematograph is rapidly making the drama universal. Who knows but what this new invention may also serve religion as soon as religion is willing to accept its assistance? The typical motion picture film today is a short acted story put on the stage by high grade actors, working out the plot contributed in some cases by such literary experts as Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, Goethe, Dickens. The moving picture began as photographs of scenery, later it employed living people, then pictures of living people doing interesting things, and thus came about the "picture play" which is a little story of real life acted in front of the camera and distributed throughout the country on a celluloid film.

#### WHAT MR. EDISON SAYS.

No one has ever charged Thomas Edison with being a cheap panderer to the vicious tastes of a debased society. Rather he has been always a friend and uplifter of the race, and it is by Mr. Edison that such words as these are written;

"Moving pictures bring to everyone an absolutely clear idea of foreign peoples through their customs and through scenes of the world and through the industries and pursuits of man. They have a tremendous educational effect. This is true even of the seemingly purely amusement moving pictures. Little cross-sections of life are shown, staged and acted better than are the cheap shows given at considerably higher prices. The motion picture is an important factor in the world's intellectual development. It will have a great uplifting effect on the morality of mankind. It will wipe out various prejudices which are often

ignorance. It will create a feeling of sympathy and a desire to uplift the downtrodden peoples of the earth. It will give new ideals to be followed. For these reasons I believe that moving pictures present the right means in the hands of broad-minded, intellectual and informed workers for the world's good, for the innocent amusement, efficient instruction and the moral advance of the great masses of people."

WHAT AN EDITOR OF THE CONGREGATIONALIST SAYS.

The Congregationalist contained two illuminating articles on motion pictures in its issues for July 9 and 16, 1910. From this writer we quote the following sentences:

"Within almost a single round of seasons the picture show has become an immense enterprise, a world-wide amusement, a universal influence. When you hear that in France during the eviction of the ecclesiastics the films played such an important part that they nearly created a rebellion; that Sweden has endowed a moving picture theatre for presenting historical scenes; that a foreign manufacturer made an offer of \$200,000 for the privilege of taking the Oberammergau Passion Play, which offer was refused—you begin to get an idea of the magnitude of the subject. Not only this, but the moving picture is rapidly taking its place beside commerce and foreign missions in making for a world brotherhood.. Read this from a staff writer of the Survey:

"'On an island two thousand miles out in the Pacific Ocean the exiled lepers of Molokai gather daily before the flickering wonders of a screen that shows them the world of life and freedom. Seated in the luxurious saloon of an ocean liner a group of travelers study life-like pictures of the countries for which they are bound. In Iceland excited Eskimos applaud the heroism of a cowboy who rescues a maiden from the redskins. Halfway round the world in Northern Russia tearful peasants sorrow over the pictured flight of a forlorn French lover. The newspaper correspondents with the battleship fleet tell us that in every corner of the globe they found the dimly lighted rooms where living tragedy and comedy flash across the screen.'

"Facts like the foregoing explain why a religious journal like

the Congregationalist sees a reason for examining such a feature of our modern life. Not only because the moving picture has become so widespread an influence is it of interest to us; but also because its possibilities have only begun to be uncovered, and in this undeveloped and unknown future educational and religious agencies seem destined to have a great share. While no one can be blind to the fact of its great possibilities for evil, the moving picture has neither done so much harm nor deserved such imprecations as have been put upon it by well-meaning but uninformed Christian people."

#### THE MECHANICS OF THE PHOToplay.

A motion picture film is usually about one thousand feet long, and contains about sixteen thousand photographs each three-quarters of an inch square. These are thrown on the screen at a rate of about sixteen or twenty a second. The scene to be photographed is sometimes staged, like a regular drama in a theatre, in the film manufacturer's studio, sometimes it is acted out in the open air. A famous film showing the Israelites crossing the Red Sea was staged on a New Jersey sand flat. The Edison Company, one of the most progressive firms of manufacturers, whose manager showed me every courtesy as I visited his studio looking into this subject a few months ago, uses a stage twice as large as that of the Metropolitan Opera House, on which often two plays will be running at the same time. Its own scene painters and stage carpenters and property men equip this stage with every requisite for showing a Biblical story, an ancient Roman drama, a modern street comedy. Every trick of photography is also utilized, and not infrequently the cost of putting on a picture play will mount up into the thousands of dollars before the film is ready to be "released". Two trade journals are published weekly giving the titles and descriptions of 30 manufacturers' output, which aggregates eight new films each day. These are handled by "exchanges" which rent the pictures to the exhibitor at prices per day varying with the quality and age of the film. An ordinary "reel" costs about \$100 to make and can be used 500 times before it becomes useless. A moving picture machine costs approximately \$225, a

fireproof booth to conform to state laws here in Connecticut costs about \$135, rentals for films average several dollars a day for each film. These facts concerning the moving picture industry at large are serviceable as furnishing the financial and sociological data on which the church has to build when it essays to adopt the photoplay for moral and spiritual uses.

#### THE RANGE OF MOTION PICTURE SUBJECTS.

The range of subjects covered by motion picture films is well-nigh limitless, and herein lies the possibility of their ministry in education. While the current taste runs largely to what we have called the picture-drama, the manufacturers are nevertheless putting out subjects to suit all classes of society and to meet all sorts of demand. A glance at the "Catalogue of Educational Motion Pictures" published by George Kleine of Chicago is likely to astonish the person who has not followed the swift expansion of this youthful industry. In this volume of 350 pages are listed thousands of films under such general department titles as Agriculture, Applied Science, Fine Arts, Literary, History, Religious, Military, Natural Science, Railroad, Sports and Travel. There exist films showing the story of the silk worm, the life of Abraham Lincoln, the process of making steel, a tour through Palestine, the Boy Scouts, the work of the Fresh Air Fund. The health crusades against tuberculosis, typhoid fever, malaria, impure milk, the pest of flies, and unhygienic housing conditions are all equipped with film-stories to aid in their campaigns. Surgical operations are shown to medical students far from the metropolitan hospital where the operation was performed; sailors and marines on our American men-of-war are taught by pictures what they could never learn so easily from books; the great events of history, reproduced with truth of costume and scenery before the motion picture camera, are now available for use in the public school and social settlement; patriotic scenes that can inspire the immigrant with an interest in America long before he knows enough English to listen to sermons are already being used; while there is scarcely an industry whose processes have not been recorded, nor a corner of the globe whose scenic charms have not been popularized

through this agency. Bacterial action, sanitation, first aid to the injured, the playground movement, the reproduction of such literary classics as Shakespeare and Cervantes and Alice in Wonderland all have been exploited by the indefatigable cameraman of the film manufacturer, whose motto seems to be that of the ancient Latin poet, "Nothing human do I regard as foreign to me". The words of Professor Frederick K. Starr of Chicago University describe the experience of not a few habitual or spasmodic attendants at the photoplay theatres:

GLOBE-TROTTING FOR A DIME.

"I have seen Niagara thunder over her gorge in the noblest frenzy ever beheld by man; I have watched a Queensland river under the white light of an Australasian moon go whirling and swirling through strange islands lurking with bandicoot and kangaroo; I have watched an English railroad train draw into a station, take on its passengers and then chug away with its stubby little engine through the Yorkshire Dells, past old Norman Abbeys silhouetted against the skyline, while a cluster of century-aged cottages loomed up in the valley below, through which a yokel drove his flocks of Southdowns; I have beheld fat old Rajahs with the price of a thousand lives bejeweled in their monster turbans and the price of a thousand deaths sewn in their royal nightshirts as they indolently swayed in golden howdahs, borne upon the backs of grunting elephants; I saw a runaway horse play battledoor and shuttlecock with the citizens and traffic of a little Italian village, whose streets had not known such commotion since the sailing of Columbus; I know how the Chinaman lives and I have been through the homes of the Japanese: I have marveled at the daring of the Alpine tobogganists and admired the wonderful skill of Norwegian ski jumpers; I have seen armies upon the battlefield and their return in triumph; I have looked upon weird dances and outlandish frolics in every quarter of the globe, and I didn't have to leave Chicago for a moment.

"No books have taught me all these wonderful things; no lecturer has pictured them; I simply dropped into a moving picture theatre at various moments of leisure; and, at the total cost for



all the visits of perhaps two performances of a foolish musical show, I have learned more than a traveller could see at the cost of thousands of dollars and years of journey.

"The talking machine has canned the great voices and master melodies of our time, but the moving picture machine has done more—it is making for us volumes of history and action. The moving picture is not a make-shift, but the highest type of entertainment in the history of the world. It stands for a better Americanism because it is attracting millions of the masses to an uplifting institution, drawing them to an improving as well as an amusing feature of city life. Its value cannot be measured now, but another generation will benefit more largely through its influences than we of today can possibly realize."

#### THE SILENT DRAMA.

Besides the "educational" films just described there are the more common picture dramas, "canned drama" they have been called, which cover in their sweep of interest almost every comic and tragic possibility in human experience. Ordinarily the story requires about twenty minutes for the telling by motion picture machine. These stories are as various as the stories printed in our newspapers and magazines, and while many of them have no moral message one way or the other, a considerable percentage are easily adaptable to pulpit use. The selection of these "homiletic" films can be made from the detailed descriptions printed in the trade journals, this selection having been approved by the "booking agent" of any intelligent exchange. Such a booking agent I talked with in Boston recently, and his familiarity with the plots, details of scenery and religious availability of several thousand films in his "library" quite amazed me.

If it excites surprise to hear that there is any religious availability at all in a form of entertainment created for commercial ends and to amuse the multitude, the explanation is to be found in an absolutely unique institution which is practically dominating the picture drama industry in the United States today. This is the National Board of Censorship for Motion Pictures.

#### THE NATIONAL BOARD OF CENSORSHIP.

In 1909 the People's Institute of New York, under the leadership of Prof. Charles Sprague Smith, and several of the more progressive firms of film manufacturers decided that it would be conducive both to public morals and good business to have the motion picture output of the country censored by a disinterested body of intelligent critics. Accordingly in March of that year the Board was formed with such men on its advisory committee as Lyman Abbott, Andrew Carnegie, Robert De Forest, Samuel Gompers, Jacob Riis, Anson Phelps Stokes and Rabbi Wise. The general committee of supervision is headed by Professor George W. Knox of Union Seminary, and it has representatives from the Charity Organization Society, the City Vigilance League, the International Committee Y. M. C. A., the New York City Federation of Women's Clubs and other philanthropic organizations. This committee uses two secretaries and arranges for the inspection of new films by a group of critics, who shall approve or disapprove them. The Censorship attempts on its part not to place unreasonable and Puritanic handicaps upon the manufacturers, while the manufacturers agree not to release any film until it has the sanction of this Board. During the eighteen months since the Board was organized its services have been accepted by an ever-increasing proportion of the manufacturers until now it can be reported (I quote a letter from the Censorship Board under date of November 23, 1910) that the Board "passes upon every new film produced or imported into the United States."

This frank, willing and complete submission of an amusement industry to intelligent supervision in behalf of public morals is something absolutely new in human society, and the fact should have the attention which it deserves. After a few months to allow for the recall of films put out by firms that only lately accepted the Censorship, it will be true that in not a single one of the 10,000 M. P. theatres in the country can a film be seen by man, woman or child but has been passed upon by a committee of criticism whose sole reason for being was a desire to uplift the standard of the picture drama. In view of this fact it



surely behooves social reformers and zealous charity workers and well-meaning clergymen to secure first-hand evidence before they let themselves accept and repeat the careless and often unjust criticism passed upon the picture drama. Meanwhile the Board welcomes suggestions as to its work, and will attend to any criticisms on the motion pictures shown in any part of the country if only definite information is furnished of the title of the film, the manufacturer, the date and place where it was seen.

Of course the work of this Board has imperfections, which it admits frankly: and even if its work were leisurely and perfectly done, it would fail to satisfy all interested parties. In this connection a few sentences from their circular are worth reprinting:

#### THE PROBLEMS OF THE CENSOR.

“The censoring committee of the Board of Censorship is made up of social workers, literary and professional people, and earnest men and women of general culture; they give their time entirely without compensation.

“The task of censoring is a perplexing and delicate one, and it is not easy to make clear in a few words the methods used. The members of the committee are influenced by three distinct factors: Their own original and personal opinion; the public opinion of the various sections of the country in whose behalf the censoring is done, and the practical necessities of the moving picture art, which call for a policy of steady but gradual improvement rather than uncompromising severity. It should be remembered that the standards of censorship necessarily vary from city to city. It is therefore impossible for the Board of Censorship to exhaustively satisfy all sections of the country and all groups of public opinion with regard to each detailed verdict it may reach in motion pictures. The Board has been criticised for too much liberality in some instances; for too much severity in others. The Board desires and earnestly invites criticism, merely urging that the criticism be not on the strength of hear-say testimony, but only after the critic has himself seen the picture in question.

#### THE REPRESENTATION OF CRIME.

"The ideals and practical method of the Board of Censorship may be summed up in a few words. Primarily, motion pictures are a form of dramatic art, and, as such, they deal with real life and the problems of real life, and among these problems are moral problems, involving conduct which, in real life, would be criminal. The drama of all ages has dealt with real life and its serious moral problems, and the Board of Censorship recognizes that moving pictures are essentially a form of drama. But the Censorship insists that there shall be no sensationalism and no representation of crime, except with the object of conveying a moral lesson. "Crime for crime's sake" is condemned. Certain socially forbidden themes, are of course, proscribed, and any leaning toward over-sensationalism is discouraged. But for the extreme demand which is sometimes made, namely that all pictures of crime or violence be forbidden, the Board is compelled to point out that such a standard would prohibit practically all of Shakespeare and the other classics, and even some of the best Biblical motion pictures that have been made, and would likewise make impossible such historical pictures as the life of Washington.

"Nor is it possible to confine motion pictures to those themes which are entirely proper to discuss in the presence of children. Many legitimate themes of literature, drama, and general interest are looked upon as topics for adults, which cannot be gone into exhaustively with children. It is unlikely that many children either understand or take an interest in the complex problems of social life which the theatre and likewise the motion pictures sometimes make use of. Large as is the number of children who attend the motion picture shows, more than two-thirds of the total audience is adult. Much that the adult receives and can healthfully digest, simply goes over the heads of the children, and if children are defended from the calculated immoral lesson and from excessive scenes of horror and violence, and from a too large proportion of any kind of violence, much, at least, has been accomplished. In any case the child is subject to both his parents and to the local laws which in many cases exclude unaccompanied children from motion picture shows.

"The motion picture theatre involves many problems, other than the problem of the motion picture. There is a local police problem, and a problem of proper fire protection, sanitation, ventilation, lighting; a problem of the vaudeville which is often given as an interlude to the pictures. These are all purely local problems, and they are too often overlooked by those who have become interested in motion pictures. The Board of Censorship has gathered much information about the methods of local regulation for picture shows and improved methods which can be urged on the local exhibitor, and is anxious to place at the disposal of every community any information of this sort that is on hand.

#### BROADENING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PHOTOPLAY.

"In addition to the work of censoring the Board is endeavoring to develop the social possibilities of moving pictures. The Board sees in the moving pictures an agent that can educate. The right kind of entertainment may itself be educational, but the moving picture is also capable of use in direct pedagogical ways. The Board is using every effort to open up this field among public and private institutions. At the same time, the business standpoint must be recognized and the practical value of producing films for educational use demonstrated to the trade.

"In struggling with the moving picture problem the Censorship is dealing with nine-tenths of the total theatre problem. Moving pictures are now the most important form of cheap amusement in the country. They reach the young, immigrants, family groups, the formative and impressionable section of our cities, as no other form of amusement, and cannot but be vital influences for ill or good. They are the only theatre which it is possible for the entire family of the wageworker to attend. In their social and educational possibilities they provide the basis for a neighborhood theatre of the people."

#### CENSORIOUSNESS AND CENSORSHIP.

Having had the privilege of sitting with the Censors for one day of their labors, the writer can testify that their work is done with a serious consciousness of the hundreds of thousands of people whose moral outlook and views of life are to

be unwittingly and yet really influenced by their quiet verdict written upon a slip of paper. A session of this committee, once the imagination travels out in space and time and reckons with consequences, becomes one of the most solemn experiences a person can have. Its verdict is absolute, moreover, and though sometimes its rejection of a film means the loss of thousands of dollars of initial expense to the maker, there has not yet been any revolt against its verdicts. Far more hindrance has come to the work of the Censorship from earnest, but not always the most catholic-minded men and women of piety who would impose an impossible standard of refinement and conventional morality upon this mode of popular entertainment. They forget that Mulberry Bend wants something more highly seasoned than Anthony Trollope—that Mott street and Hester street for the most part scorn the church and its prayer meetings. The work of the Censorship should not be so much condemned for its falling short of a perfect standard as gratefully approved for its monumental achievement, judged by what went before. The low vaudeville which has been superseded to so great an extent by the photoplay ought to be still further eliminated. This will not be as easy a task as it was to purify the motion picture of French suggestiveness and American morbidity, for the vaudeville cannot be disinfected at its source as is possible with the picture drama, the latter being altogether manufactured and distributed from New York City. But there is no doubt in the minds of many that sooner or later, the better elements of a community will have to supervise all popular entertainment, and indeed most of the recreation of the poor. Only thus can the highest welfare of society be secured. And when this supervision is organized, the kind of popular novel to be allowed in the public library will be defined better than it is now. In many a home of supposedly careful parents the perils from the books which the mother and children read are vastly greater than the imagined perils of the motion picture.

Having treated thus generally the motion picture as a sociological fact, we are ready to answer more specifically the question: What religious possibilities lie in it for the church and the moral reformer?

#### THE MOTION PICTURE AS A RELIGIOUS TOOL.

First, it can help the church merely as an entertainment device. The spiritual value of the church sociable has long been admitted; the indirect possibilities of religion in the oyster stew and bean supper are commonly conceded. Let the church that wishes to minister to the masses do what a few Roman Catholic churches are doing, what Rev. Charles Stelzle of New York is doing in his new Labor Temple—provide free picture shows as it provides free concerts and organ recitals.

Secondly, the motion picture can help in giving religious instruction in the Sunday School. Pictures of travel through Palestine, of Biblical scenes, of events in the history of the church are available and ought to be used extensively. In one of our public schools lately the story-hour had to do with Ulysses' adventures as recorded in the Odyssey. Imagine the teacher's surprise when she learned that her best-informed pupil had obtained his knowledge of the Greek hero through a moving picture film. As with classical heroes, so it is with religious heroes. Joseph and Esther and Moses and Paul and Jesus are better known to the theatre-goers today than they ever were before, thanks to Mr. Edison's invention. Ere long we shall give our Sunday School scholars the same advantages in vivid Biblical instruction that are now offered to the patron of the nearest "Pastime" or "Bijou".

#### GRAPHIC MISSIONARY EDUCATION.

Thirdly, the motion picture film can do more for foreign and home missions than any agency yet utilized by our assiduous and ingenious missionary secretaries. The reason for the skeptic's opposition to missions is usually to be found in his ignorance of how mission work is done and of what social conditions it aims to transform. Films dealing with travel and ethnology are very numerous—they enlighten the latter half of this ignorance; and after the critic has looked at films picturing the operations of medical and industrial missions in distant lands, he is a sluggish egoist indeed if he doesn't entertain a more tolerant mood toward the "skirmish line of the Kingdom of God".

Fourthly, the church needs to be an agent of broad civilization in its community; one aspect of its religious ministry should be the social education of the needy. All the philanthropies, the united charities, the district nurse, the hospital, the day nursery, the Y. M. C. A. and Y. W. C. A.; all the up-lift campaigns against tuberculosis and crowded tenements and in behalf of playgrounds, public baths, and neighborhood centers; all lines of civic education in American history, political institutions, municipal betterment;—all these aspects of the community's higher life need to be brought home to the public conscience and consciousness. The church should assist in this process of social illumination, and it can use no more potent aid in doing this work than the motion picture. Especially should cities where there are large alien populations, have the advantage of such dramatic instruction on the lantern screen as needs no interpreter. A picture is a sort of a graphic esperanto, a universal language; and social and domestic and personal hygiene may well be taught through its aid.

#### THE MOTION PICTURE SERMON.

Fifthly, the crowning possibility of the motion picture, though, is its usefulness to the preacher as he proclaims moral truth. It will provide the element of illustration for his discourse far better than it can be provided by the spoken word. It will make his gospel vivid, pictorial, dramatic, and above all, interesting. The motion picture preacher will have crowded congregations, not because he is sensational but because he is appealing to human nature more successfully than his fellow-clergymen, because he is adapting his message to the psychology of his hearers, because he is employing a better pedagogical method.

Why do not men, especially the common people, want to go to church more than they do? Is it not in part because they feel that the preaching of today, at many points, fails to fit their natures and meet their needs? We ministers use too often a technical jargon which the outsider characterizes only as a pitter patter of dreary nonsense and a hodge-podge of unintelligible stupidity. They say of us what the little girl said of



her pastor, "he talks to himself out of a piece of paper." If ministers as a whole were to return to Jesus' method of sermonizing, and with story and dramatic pictures drawn from contemporary experience were to illustrate a few simple ethical and spiritual realities, would not the constituency of the church become larger and more loyal?

To go one step further, if preachers gave their illustrations of spiritual truth to their hearers, not through the art of elocution to be listened to, but through the vastly higher art of pictorial drama to be seen, would not their persuasiveness be mightily enhanced? Applying these suggestions, a Sunday evening motion picture service could be arranged as follows, and it would go far toward solving the "second service problem" in many a community:

#### A MOTION PICTURE SERVICE OF WORSHIP.

Let the hymns and prayers be as usual. Let the Scripture lesson be illustrated with a film exhibiting the very incident narrated by the Bible. Let the sermon be on a practical topic like temperance, honesty, loyalty, prayer, the purity of the home, pluck or self-sacrifice, and let the sermon be illuminated by two "motion picture parables" from present-day life.

The three films will use up about an hour, the entire service being put into an hour and a quarter. The preacher can combine his Bible reading or sermon with the motion picture, or the picture can be run off silently or to an organ accompaniment, while the words before and after the picture help to drive home the message. One man may find it easier to follow the example of the stereopticon lecture where the pictures are interpreted by speech, another man may follow the example of the moving picture entertainment where the pictures speak for themselves. In many places a licensed operator from a local M. P. theatre which is not open on Sunday can be obtained to manage the lantern.

#### COST OF A MOTION PICTURE EQUIPMENT.

The equipment for carrying on this kind of a service would be a motion picture machine, a booth, a screen; and an understanding with some exchange whereby the necessary films could

be received in season so that the preacher might acquaint himself with the story before Sunday. In some states there are fire insurance regulations that have to be reckoned with, but in New York and most states it is not difficult to obtain permission to install a machine without increasing the rate, provided certain safety devices are used. A rough estimate of expense for a series of thirty Sunday evening services with three films for each evening, the figure to cover the purchase of apparatus and hire of films, would be seven hundred dollars. Inasmuch as the collection at such a service would probably be generous, the plan is easy of adoption in any community where a few public-spirited individuals of means are ready to guarantee any deficit left by the offerings. Meanwhile once the apparatus is purchased, it may be loaned for use in the public schools for educational work and entertainment, in such organizations as the Y. M. C. A., and the Y. W. C. A., while the playground by its help can be made more attractive on summer evenings to multitudes who would otherwise be indoors watching pictures debasingly mingled with low vaudeville. Thus the church will be rendering social service against which can be brought no charge of sectarian ambition, and this will be good both for the church and the community.

#### THE APPEAL TO THE UNCHURCHED.

In New Britain, a city of 45,000 inhabitants, it has been said that there are 30,000 persons or more who are not in any church, Protestant or Catholic, on the Sabbath. The motion picture machine consecrated to religious ends will help bring them in. In the last few years forty Protestant churches have moved out of a district in lower New York, during which time 300,000 souls have moved in. If the motion picture is added to the spiritual armament of these churches, they will not be forced thus to retreat from the very wards in the metropolis where they most are needed. The missionary commission of Christ, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel," is not being obeyed by the church as universally as it should be. What we say in effect is, that when the outside world has come to us, in church, and in our way—has spruced itself up and combed its hair and put



on some stylish clothes like ours and entered the sanctuary and learned to read our English hymnbook, then we shall give to them the words of life. Both geographically and pedagogically the church ought to go out into the highways and hedges and compel the multitude to come in. The great cry of the unchurched millions ought to ring in our ears permitting us no rest until we have availed ourselves of every conceivable device to attract them to the higher life in Jesus Christ.

#### THE LESSON OF HISTORY.

The motion picture is as yet a novelty in religious work. Hence it will be opposed by some. But if there are conscientious scruples against adopting the motion picture as one of the church tools, at least we may comfort ourselves with our reading of church history. The disfavor which is now meted out to the motion picture was aimed at the stereopticon a decade ago, at quartet singing several decades earlier, at the pipe organ before that, and still earlier at the Holy Bible printed in the vernacular; and yet, in God's own time every one of these religious agencies commended itself to the approval of Christian people. So it will be in this case. Meanwhile borrowing and rearranging words from a great American pioneer, let us of the church say that "with malice toward none, with charity towards all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in, highly resolved that religion, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that the church of Christ, the Son of Man, shall become a church of the people, by the people, for the people, never to perish from the earth."

## APPENDIX

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For the benefit of individuals or organizations desiring to look further into this subject, the following information may be of service.

The National Board of Censorship is the clearing-house of knowledge on all matters relating to motion pictures. Its executive secretary, who has immediate charge of the censoring, is Walter Storey; its educational secretary, who interprets the work of the Censorship to the public and who is striving to broaden the scope of the motion picture until it becomes a universal aid to religion and education, is John Collier. Both persons may be addressed at the offices of the People's Institute, 318 East 15th St., New York. They are always ready to correspond or make appointments for personal interviews.

The trade journals are the *Moving Picture World*, 125 East 23rd Street, and *The Film Index*, 1 Madison Avenue, New York City. These publications contain advertisements which will be of service to any persons meditating the purchase of apparatus. They also contain descriptions of all films published. The latter paper contains announcements for only the "licensed manufacturer", the former contains their announcements and also the announcements put out by the so-called "independents". From both groups of makers about fifty new films are released each week, all of them now censored.

Articles on motion pictures and the industry of producing them may be found in the following recent periodicals:

- Congregationalist, Boston, July 9 and 16, 1910.
- American Magazine, New York, September, '09, page 493.
- Outlook, New York, November 27, '09, page 703.
- Survey, New York, April 3, '09, page 8.
- Survey, New York, June 5, '09, page 355.
- Playground, New York, October, '10, page 232.

The General Committee of the National Board of Censorship consists of the following persons.

<i>Union Theological Seminary,</i>	Rev. Dr. Geo. William Knox, <i>Chairman.</i>
<i>Charity Organization Society,</i>	W. Frank Persons
<i>Children's Aid Society,</i>	Matthew P. Adams
<i>City Vigilance Committee,</i>	Matthew Beattie
<i>Ethical-Social League,</i>	George William Knox
<i>International Committee, Y. M. C. A.</i>	George B. Pratt
<i>League for Political Education,</i>	Robert E. Ely
<i>New York City Federation of Women's Clubs,</i>	Mrs. Emma F. Fisk
<i>Public Education Association,</i>	Mrs. Miriam Sutro Price
<i>Woman's Municipal League,</i>	Miss M. Serena Townsend

*Members at Large.*

John Collier	Mrs. Augusta Prescott
A. W. Dennen	Mrs. Josephine Redding
Ralph Folks	Gustave Straubenmuller
Dr. Henry Moskowitz	Dr. J. P. Warbasse

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**SAMPLE FILM LIST.**

In answer to many inquiries as to what films would be available for religious uses, the following list is appended. It is unlikely that any renting exchange would have all these in stock, and naturally the films become worn out with time; hence this list is more suggestive than accurate. Moreover, the compiler is not sure that further investigation would lead him to pass all the films here listed, but if he were today to arrange a series of services for the current winter, he would cull his pictures from this list corrected up to date and adapted to the resources of the exchange.

The desirability of having business relationships with a large metropolitan exchange in Chicago or New York or Boston is evident, when it is remembered that the percentage of "educational" films demanded by the average theatre is small, and a

smaller exchange will not carry stock that does not have theatrical value. It is to be hoped that in the course of time schools and churches and social centres will take up this invention so generally that they can be organized into "circuits" as the theatres are now, and thus secure the line of film suited to their purposes.

In this list the title of the film is followed by the name of the company which published it, and when a date is added, it stands approximately for the date of the copy of the trade journals volume for 1910, where the film-story is printed. Recently there have been a large number of excellent films, even better in many cases than these put on the market, but the writer has not been following the literature closely enough to make his list authoritative up to date. Any booking agent, however, on learning the ideals of a prospective patron, will have little difficulty in furnishing what is desired. And the terms on which films can be secured for educational purposes just now are very favorable, for the trade is anxious to hasten the day when the moving picture will be as indispensable to education as the stereopticon is now.

#### SCRIPTURAL FILMS.

Marriage of Esther	Gaumont	June 11
Esther and Mordecai	Gaumont	June 18
St. Paul and the Centurion	Urban	June 29
The Vow—Jephtha's Daughter	Gaumont	Aug. 27
The Life of Moses, 4 reels of film	Gaumont	Kleine Catalogue
The Passion Play, reproduced, 2 reels	Gaumont	Kleine Catalogue
The Birth of Christ	Gaumont	Kleine Catalogue
Joseph Sold by His Brethren		
Resurrection of Lazarus	Eclair	Nov. 12
Pharaoh, Israel in Egypt	Gaumont	Nov. 12
The Woman of Samaria	Pathe	Nov. 5
Samson's Betrayal	Gaumont	Nov. 26

#### GENERAL AND OCCASIONAL FILMS.

Life Saving Drill	Edison	June 14
Uncle Tom's Cabin, 3 reels	Vitagraph	July 26
Alice in Wonderland	Edison	Sep. 9
Conspiracy of Pontiac	Kalem	Sep. 23
The Night Before Christmas		Kleine Catalogue
Life of Columbus		Kleine Catalogue
Life of Washington, 2 reels		
Life of Napoleon		
Life of Lincoln		
Lincoln's Clemency	Pathe	Nov. 5

The Boy Scouts	Edison	Nov. 5
John Halifax, Gentleman	Thanhouser	Dec. 3
Merry Wives of Windsor	Selig	Nov. 26
Life of Moliere	Gaumont	Oct. 29
The Man Who Learned (pure milk)	Edison	Sep. 2
The Healing Faith (tuberculosis)	Lubin	Sep. 5
The Little Mother (fresh air fund)	Kalem	Sep. 14
The Fly Pest		

### SERMON PARABLE FILMS.

These can be adapted for use as illustrations in sermons.

The Flag of Company H.	<i>Loyalty</i>	Pathe	June 6
Ito, the Beggar Boy	<i>Sacrifice</i>	Vitagraph	June 18
Hako's Sacrifice	<i>Sacrifice</i>	Vitagraph	July 23
Old Glory	<i>Patriotic</i>	Vitagraph	July 2
Stars and Stripes	<i>Patriotic</i>	Edison	July 1
The Little Fiddler	<i>Redemption</i>	Edison	June 28
A Child's Faith	<i>Prayer</i>	Biograph	July 14
Her Father's Pride	<i>Vanity</i>	Biograph	Aug. 4
A Salutary Lesson	<i>Parental Duty</i>	Vitagraph	Aug. 11
Rose Leaves	<i>City Dangers</i>	Vitagraph	Aug. 27
A Life for a Life	<i>Divinity in Man</i>	Vitagraph	Sen. 2
The Three of Them	<i>Children</i>	Vitagraph	Sep. 10
The Sergeant	<i>Misjudgments</i>	Selig	Sep. 22
Examination Day	<i>Old Age</i>	Biograph	
School in New Guinea	<i>Missions</i>	Pathe	Aug. 20
The Sepoy's Wife	<i>Medical Missions</i>	Vitagraph	Sep. 13
From Tyranny to Liberty	<i>Freedom</i>	Edison	Aug. 30
Immigrant's Progress in Canada	<i>Immigrant</i>	Urban	
Mozart's Last Requiem	<i>Music</i>	Gaumont	

A repository of information on educational films is the Catalogue of Educational Motion Pictures published by Geo. Kleine, at 52 State Street, Chicago, Ill. This will be sent for fifteen cents to cover postage.

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*Additional copies of this pamphlet will be furnished, as long as the supply holds out, for five cents to cover postage. Address Rev. Herbert A. Jump, New Britain, Conn.*

### A NEWSBOY'S POINT OF VIEW.

I likes de movin' pitchures—yep—I tinks dere out er sight;  
I used to go to see dem wid me goil on Sunday night.  
Now don't yer kid me, Skinny, jest fer callin' her "me goil"—  
It's Mag, what peddled papers down on Main street, corner Pearl.  
Her old man was a rummy, an' her mudder, she scrubbed floors  
An' took in family washin's—she just kept de wolf out-doors. . .

Me an' Maggie an' her ma (we sometimes took her, too,  
We'd set up in de galry dere, upon a Sunday night,  
To be what dey calls "shaper-own," just like de rich guys do.)  
An' sometimes Mag's old man would come, when he was feelin' right,  
Which made Mag's ma so cheery—why, it made de old dame feel  
Just as happy as a hobo dreamin' of a good square meal.

An' wunst we seen a movin' pitchure of a guy wot boozed  
An' den come home an' 'bused his wife, jest like Mag's old man used.  
De old man didn't say nuttin', but I sees him bite his lip  
An' feel back at de pint o' gin he carries on his hip,  
An' when he gets out in de street, by jinks! I hears a clink,  
An' splash down in de gutter where he'd gone and chucked de drink.

Right dere he took an' climbed up on de water wagon seat,  
An' ever since Mag an' her ma has clothes an' lots to eat.  
De old man's got a steady job, he works now ev'ry day,  
An' it would do your heart good just for once to hear him say—  
"I never knowed just what a bum I'd gone an' got to be  
Until those movin' pitchures went an' showed myself to me."

All what I see wit' me own eyes I knows an' understand's.  
When I sees movin' pitchures of de far-off, furrin lan's,  
Where de Hunks an' Ginnies comes from—yer can betcher life I knows  
Dat of all de lan's an' countries, 'taint no matter where yer goes—  
Dis here country's got 'em beaten—take me oat dat aint no kid—  
'Cause we learned it from de movin' pitchures, me an' Maggie did.

—Selected.











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